



*Accelerated Literacy
Practitioners' Association Australia*

ALPAA Text Notes

Hatchet

by Gary Paulsen (1987: MacMillan Children's Books)

Teaching notes

**for use with the Accelerated Literacy teaching routine,
written by Wendy Cowey for ALPAA**

These notes have been developed by AL practitioners and are offered in good faith for other AL teachers to use as a resource for their own classroom teaching.

Notes on this site presume that the people who use them have some training in the Accelerated Literacy teaching method. This knowledge could include professional development such as the Accelerated Literacy Intensive or state or territory school based training.

More detailed notes as well as Accelerated Literacy Practitioner Guides are available on the National Digital Learning Resources Network (NDLRN) http://www.ndlrn.edu.au/using_digital_resources/accessing_resources/accessing_resources.html. The notes on this website are detailed and provide additional information on how to teach Accelerated Literacy. Reading at least some of these notes will provide a background to the notes that follow on the ALPAA site.

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Hatchet

Paulsen, Gary (1987). Hatchet. Macmillan Children's Books

Year Level: Years 7- 9

Synopsis of the story

This is a story about a life-changing incident experienced by thirteen year old Brian Robeson who is suffering the upset of his parent's recent divorce. He has to live with his mother and visit his father in holidays.

The story starts with Brian preparing to travel to spend his first holiday with his father, an engineer on an oil rig in a remote area in the far north of Canada. Because the area is so remote he has to travel there in a single engine plane with just the pilot as company.

On the way his pilot has a heart attack and the plane crashes in the Canadian wilderness, leaving Brian to fend for himself and struggle to survive. All he has is the hatchet his mother gave him as he left home. To survive Brian has to put aside his emotional pain and use what resources he has.

Website information:

Information about the author can be found on:

<http://www.randomhouse.com/features/garypaulsen/about.html>

Teachers could also choose from a large range of websites to find information about the geography of Canada and its wildlife to help students build an understanding of the context in which the story is set.

Themes

A major theme of the book is growing up or achieving emotional maturity. Brian had been deeply upset by his parents' divorce. He was angry with his mother and missed his father. To survive he had to put his hurt aside and focus on keeping himself alive. As he said, he became 'tough in the head'.

Another theme of this book is tenacity. Brian first faced landing a plane with a dead pilot at his side. Then, having landed without any resources other than himself and the hatchet his mother had given him as a going away present, he had to survive in the Canadian wilderness. He was unswervingly determined to survive and persevered against all odds to find food, a means of cooking and adequate shelter.

Brian also demonstrated remarkable resourcefulness in that he was able to draw on all the experiences of his past to bring to his situation. He drew on what he had learned from school and other people to light a fire and catch

fish. When he was faced with a problem, he used what he knew and his own experience to solve it.

Why use this story?

The main character is a thirteen year-old boy and the book appeals to students of around that age because of the dramatic adventures he has while fighting for survival. As he acknowledged himself, he was a city boy and had never been taught survival skills.

The book was a Newberry Honour Book and contains literate language resources that can be used to teach students to write suspenseful text.

Study passage

A passage of 447 words is identified below. It represents a pivotal incident in the story that leads to Brian discovering how to make fire. The passage, however, should not be dealt with out of context of the whole chapter.

In this passage the author uses what the character can hear, smell and sense rather than what he can see to build an atmosphere of fear and hopelessness. It represents a turning point in the story where the character could have given up but doesn't.

The passage also demonstrates the use of foreshadowing. In the previous chapter Brian had seen a bear near his cave. When he heard a noise in the night then, his first thought was that it was the bear. In addition, the passage describes a dream Brian had that provides him with a hint about how to make fire that in turn, changes his ability to survive in the wild completely.

Chapter 8 Pages 63-64

At first he thought it was a growl. In the still darkness of the shelter in the middle of the night his eyes came open and he was awake and he thought there was a growl. But it was the wind, a medium wind in the pines had made some sound and brought him up, brought him awake. He sat up and was hit with the smell.

It terrified him. The smell was one of rot, some musty rot that made him think only of graves with cobwebs and dust and old death. His nostrils widened and he opened his eyes wider but he could see nothing. It was too dark, too hard dark with clouds covering even the small light from the stars, and he could not see. But the smell was alive, alive and full and in the shelter. He thought of the bear, thought of Bigfoot and every monster he had ever seen in every horror film he had ever watched, and his heart hammered in his throat.

Then he heard the slithering. A brushing sound, a slithering brushing sound near his feet – and he kicked out as hard as he could, kicked out and threw the hatchet at the sound, a noise coming from his throat. But the hatchet missed, sailed into the wall where it hit the rocks with a shower of sparks, and his leg was instantly torn with pain, as if a hundred needles and been driven into it. “Unnnngh!”

Now he screamed, with the pain and fear, and skittered on his backside up into the corner of the shelter, breathing through his mouth, straining to see, to hear.

The slithering sound moved again, he stopped his breath. He felt he could see a low dark form, a bulk in the darkness, a shadow that lived, but now it moved away, slithering and scraping it moved away and he saw, or thought he saw it go out of the door opening.

He lay on his side for a moment, then pulled a rasping breath in and held it, listening for the attacker to return. When it was apparent that the shadow wasn't coming back he felt the calf of his leg, where the pain was centred, and spreading to fill the whole leg.

His fingers gingerly touched a group of needles that had been driven through his trousers and into the fleshy part of his calf. They were stiff and very sharp on the ends that stuck out, and he knew then what the attacker had been. A porcupine had stumbled into his shelter and when he had kicked it the thing had slapped him with its tail of quills.

447 words

Specific language features and/or writing techniques

Structural Organisation of text	Why language choices are made in this text
<p>Awareness of a sound At first he thought it was a growl.</p> <p>Setting In the still darkness of the shelter in the middle of the night</p> <p>Character's response his eyes came open and he was awake</p>	<p>Awareness of a sound <i>At first</i>, (when) indicates that the passage will be staged in the order events occur.</p> <p><i>he thought</i>, indicates that Brian (he) was not sure of what had woken him but <i>he thought it was a growl</i>.</p> <p>Readers would remember that at the end of the previous chapter, Brian had discovered a patch of raspberries that he had eaten and collected as some of the first real food he had found since the crash. On one hand he was happy and satisfied but, while collecting the fruit, a bear had appeared to feast on the berries as well. The bear had not bothered Brian at the time, but nevertheless, he was afraid of it. As he settled down to sleep in his shelter that night he made sure his hatchet was close to his hand and the bear, with its possible threat of attack, was foremost in his mind. Therefore, when he awoke, it was logical for Brian to think first of the bear as the source of <i>a growl</i>. <i>Thought</i> is a mental verb and tells what he was thinking not what he was doing.</p> <p>Because the focus of this passage is the sound Brian thought he heard, it came first in the passage.</p> <p>Setting Now the author reminds readers of the setting. He reminds readers of where and when the event occurred. <i>In the still darkness of the shelter</i> places <i>the still darkness</i> first (in theme position) to emphasise that Brian would not be able to see much. Because it was <i>still</i> in his shelter, any sounds would be magnified. <i>in the middle of the night</i>, further emphasises the darkness. By adding when the event occurred readers can further identify with Brian's anxiety.</p> <p>Character's response <i>his eyes came open, and he was awake</i>, indicates Brian's two actions on sensing a growl. First <i>his eyes came open</i>, an automatic response on waking but readers know from the beginning of the passage that his eyes will be no use to him in discovering what it is that has disturbed his sleep. Then <i>he was awake</i> but without the benefit of being able to see. He couldn't even light a fire at this stage in the narrative.</p>

<p>and he thought there was a growl.</p> <p>But it was the wind, a medium wind in the pines had made some sound and brought him up, brought him awake.</p> <p>He sat up</p> <p>Awareness of an odour and was hit with the smell.</p> <p>Character's Response It terrified him.</p> <p>Description of odour The smell was one of rot, some musty rot that made him think only of graves with cobwebs and dust and old death.</p> <p>Character's reaction His nostrils widened</p> <p>and he opened his eyes wider</p>	<p><i>and he thought there was a growl.</i> This addition tells readers that Brian <i>thought</i> the sound that had woken him was a growl. In other words he didn't know it was a growl, he thought it was. It would be natural, following the passage in the previous chapter about the bear to fear that a bear was the cause of the noise.</p> <p><i>But</i>, placed first for emphasis, tells readers that it was not the growl of the bear he heard. Then the author divulges the real cause of the sound, '<i>a medium wind in the pines had made some sound,</i>'</p> <p>It was a harmless sound that had '<i>brought him up, brought him awake.</i>' The fact that a medium wind, not a strong wind, had woken Brian is another indication of his nervousness as he learns to cope with his very unfamiliar surroundings.</p> <p>In response to being woken, <i>he sat up</i>. Now he is not as helpless as he was lying down.</p> <p>Awareness of an odour Now that Brian was awake, and sitting the author introduces a smell. It was not the smell that woke him, but now that he was awake, <i>he was hit with the smell</i>. To be <i>hit</i> with a smell emphasises its pungency.</p> <p>Character's response <i>It terrified him</i>, tells readers that Brian is very afraid of what might be making the smell. The description of the smell that follows only intensifies that feeling.</p> <p>Description of odour <i>The smell was one of rot, some musty rot that made him think only of graves with cobwebs and dust and old death.</i> This elaboration of the nature of the smell allows readers to share Brian's feeling of terror. <i>Rot</i> is expanded to <i>musty rot that made him think ...</i> Thus the smell is linked to unpleasant images of <i>graves with cobwebs and dust and old death</i>. Presumably, old death consists of skeletons and tombs or rotting bodies.</p> <p>Character's reaction Next, Brian's physical response to the terrifying smell is elaborated still further by focussing on the specific organ of smell, his nose. <i>His nostrils widened</i>. A person's nostrils widen in response to an unrecognised smell or to a particularly strong one.</p> <p>As well, <i>he opened his eyes wider</i>,</p>
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<p>but he could see nothing.</p> <p>It was too dark, too hard dark with clouds covering even the small light from the stars, and he could not see.</p> <p>But the smell was alive, alive and full and in the shelter.</p> <p>Character's thoughts He thought of the bear, thought of Bigfoot and every monster he had ever seen in every horror film he had ever watched,</p> <p>Reaction and his heart hammered in his throat.</p> <p>Awareness of a sound Then he heard the slithering. A brushing sound, a slithering brushing sound near his feet</p>	<p>but he could see nothing. While Brian's eyes widened in response to the smell, the word but informs readers that opening his eyes wider did not enhance his sight. Even though he was opening his eyes wide <i>he could see nothing</i>.</p> <p>This contrast is further expanded by reminding readers of the darkness. It was <i>too dark</i>, then <i>too dark with clouds covering even the small light from the stars</i>. To summarise the author restates that Brian <i>could not see</i>. Readers are now in no doubt that Brian could not rely on his eyes for information about what was making the sound and smell. He could use the senses of hearing and smell but not sight.</p> <p>"But the smell was alive, alive and full in the shelter." By starting the sentence with <i>but</i>, the author brings readers from the darkness back to the smell. By making it seem <i>alive and full</i> the smell is identified as coming from something living, right there in the shelter. It is an unknown quantity that Brian will have to deal with.</p> <p>Character's thoughts The author pauses the action here to inform readers of what was going on in Brian's imagination. If we know what a character is thinking we can identify with that person. Because he couldn't see, he imagined all the monsters and horror films he had ever watched. He certainly didn't think anything good could be in the shelter with him.</p> <p>Reaction To emphasise his fear the author adds a physical reaction '<i>his heart hammered in his throat</i>,' so that readers fully understand the fear Brian experienced that night.</p> <p>Awareness of a sound The author starts this clause with <i>Then</i>, a conjunction that places this incident next in the sequence of events. The next thing that happened, then, is that <i>he heard the slithering</i>. The next sense that is used in this passage is Brian's hearing. Earlier he had been woken by a sound, then he smelled something, and now the author returns to a sound. The sound that woke Brian turned out to be the wind in the trees, and this sound is in the shelter with him.</p> <p><i>The slithering</i> is then expanded to, <i>A brushing sound, a slithering brushing sound</i>. Brian still didn't know what was making the sound but he knew how it smelled and sounded. By withholding information about the actual</p>
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<p>Character's reaction -and he kicked out as hard as he could, kicked out and threw the hatchet at the sound, a noise coming from his throat.</p> <p>But the hatchet missed,</p> <p>sailed into the wall where it hit the rocks with a shower of sparks,</p> <p>Source of the noise and his leg was instantly torn with pain, as if a hundred needles had been driven into it.</p>	<p>source of the sound, the author builds suspense. He also builds suspense by drawing out the description so that readers can imagine more possibilities. It starts as <i>the slithering</i>, then becomes <i>a brushing sound</i> and finally <i>a slithering brushing sound</i>.</p> <p>This sound, filled with horrible possibilities, then comes from <i>near his feet</i>. This location is very near him and thus more threatening.</p> <p>Character's reaction <i>-and he kicked out as hard as he could, kicked out</i>. Brian's first reaction to this sound was physical. The author repeats the words <i>kicked out</i> to emphasise the violence of his reaction. <i>and threw the hatchet at the sound</i>, describes his next reaction. He had left the hatchet nearby when he went to sleep and so it was at hand to throw as defence. At the same time, <i>a noise coming from his throat</i>, shows that he made a sound. It was natural to make a frightened sound that further emphasised his panic.</p> <p>But the hatchet missed, – again, the author uses the word but to indicate something adverse is going to happen. In other words, the hatchet missed whatever was there. His throw was wasted.</p> <p>As a result it <i>sailed into the wall where it hit the rocks with a shower of sparks</i>. The use of the verb <i>sailed</i> tells readers that the hatchet flew through the air some distance but that is not all it did. The author adds <i>where it hit the rocks with a shower of sparks</i>. This additional information about the hatchet's flight through the air gives readers information about how hard Brian had thrown it in his fright but it also foreshadows a future discovery. Later, Brian will remember this moment and use it to help him make fire.</p> <p>Source of the noise The author still withholds the identity of the creature making the noise but readers would now be suspecting what it could be from the use of the word needles.</p> <p>First Brian's leg <i>was instantly torn with pain</i>. The pain was immediate (<i>instantly</i>) and to be <i>torn</i> implies some damage to the skin. The author adds more information about the pain by using a simile – <i>as if a hundred needles had been driven into it</i>. By using a hundred needles to describe the pain, the author emphasises its intensity. One needle would be bad enough but a thousand would be excruciating.</p>
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Character's reaction
"Unnnngh!"

Now he screamed, with the pain and fear, and skittered on his backside up into the corner of the shelter, breathing through his mouth, straining to see, to hear.

Awareness of a sound

The slithering sound moved again,

Reaction

he stopped his breath.
He felt
he could see a low dark form, a bulk in the darkness,
a shadow that lived,
but now it moved away,
slithering and scraping
it moved away
and he saw,
or thought
he saw
it go out of the door opening.

Character's reaction

Understandingly enough, Brian screamed although there was no one there to hear or help him. Perhaps the noise he made could have served to frighten whatever had hurt him.

Now, is in theme position in the clause to reinforce its immediacy.

As well as the actual scream (*Unnnngh!*) the author expands on why Brian screamed – *with the pain and fear*. Readers can thus identify with Brian's experience.

As well as screaming Brian moved. He *skittered on his backside*. Skittered implies that he was still sitting and that information is added by telling readers where he skittered. First *on his backside* to show perhaps that his leg was hurting so much that all he could think of was escaping, then by adding where in the shelter (*up into the corner of the shelter*). He was then as far as he could get from the source of the pain.

To further expand on Brian's fear the author adds more details about his physical reactions. He was *breathing through his mouth*, a physical reaction that demonstrates fear. No one in a panic breathes through the nose. Then *straining to see, to hear*.

While there are three processes involved here they are all to do with senses. Straining involves a mental struggle. It means he actually couldn't see or *hear* however hard he tried (or strained).

Awareness of a sound

Next, the author returns to the sound being made by the unknown entity. It is *slithering* and it *moved again*. Brian would realise he was still in danger. *Slithering* is a particularly threatening deadly snakelike sound.

Reaction

Brian reacted by holding (*stopped*) his breath, probably to hear more clearly.

Felt is a mental verb that implies that Brian has been straining to see in the darkness to the point where even the slightest difference in dark and shadow gave him an impression of sight although nothing was clear enough to be sure.

The description of what he *felt he could see* is detailed.

It tells readers:

- what Brian felt he could see. First, *a low dark form*, giving readers have an image of its position and density.

a bulk in the darkness, which adds to the grim darkness but also gives an impression of solidity.

<p>Final reactions He lay on his side for a moment, then pulled a rasping breath in and held it, listening for the attacker to return.</p> <p>When it was apparent that the shadow wasn't coming back he felt the calf of his leg, where the pain was centred, and spreading to fill the whole leg.</p> <p>His fingers gingerly touched a group of needles that had been driven through his trousers and into the fleshy part of his calf.</p>	<p><i>a shadow that lived</i>, adds to the impression of darkness but also confirms that the object is a living creature.</p> <p>-what it did (but now it moved away): the use of <i>but</i> again serves to signal that a change is coming. Now the dark form moved away which reduced its continuing threat.</p> <p>-what he heard (<i>slithering and scraping</i>), because it was still dark the author continues to describe what Brian could hear: <i>slithering</i> and <i>scraping</i> are consistent with the form being low down and bulky, and</p> <p>-what else he observed (<i>he saw or thought he saw it go out the door opening</i>). He saw or thought he saw are mental verbs again conveying Brian's inability to see what has hurt him. At least what he thought he saw was the intruder leave through the door opening. As it leaves, readers can return to Brian and his predicament.</p> <p>Final reactions With the departure of the creature that caused his pain, the author relates how Brian reacted to being left hurt. First, <i>he lay on his side</i> implies exhaustion both from pain and fear, but he could only spare a <i>moment</i> for that. His next actions were to pull a rasping breath in and hold it. A rasping breath is a desperate one. Why did he hold his breath then? The author adds <i>listening for the attacker to return</i> so that readers know.</p> <p>Next, <i>it was apparent that the shadow wasn't coming back</i>. Now Brian has decided that the attacker or shadow (readers still don't know for sure what it is yet although they may have suspicions) is gone and so he could attend to his wounds.</p> <p>First, <i>he felt the calf of his leg</i>, and the reason why was because it was <i>where the pain was centred and spreading to fill the whole leg</i>. Because Brian couldn't see, he had to establish the extent of his wound using his sense of touch. The fact that the pain was spreading indicates that it was very painful indeed. He used his fingers first (<i>gingerly</i>). He was very cautious though as his leg was so painful and he wouldn't want to make it feel worse.</p> <p>He then <i>touched a group of needles that had been driven through his trousers and into the fleshy part of his calf</i>. This detailed description provides the reason why his calf was so sore. That the needles had been driven implies force</p>
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<p>They were stiff and very sharp on the ends that stuck out,</p> <p>Revelation and he knew then what the attacker had been. A porcupine had stumbled into his shelter and when he had kicked it the thing had slapped him with its tail of quills.</p>	<p>and the force was enough to pierce his trousers as well as his flesh. The fact that the word needles has been reintroduced into the text foreshadows more exactly what the intruder was.</p> <p>The author then provides a more detailed description of two qualities of the needles. <i>They were stiff and very sharp on the ends that stuck out.</i></p> <p>Revelation Finally, Brian <i>knew what the attacker had been.</i> At last readers find out for sure what had attacked Brian in his shelter.</p> <p>It was a porcupine but not just any porcupine but one that <i>had stumbled into his shelter.</i> By using the word stumbled, the author implies that there was no malice or planning to harm by the porcupine. It was simply chance that it had come that way that night. The author adds, <i>when he had kicked it,</i> so that readers realise that it was Brian's kick that had caused the porcupine to slap him <i>with its tail of quills.</i></p> <p>This statement confirms that Brian was in a miserable situation. He is unfamiliar with the environment and does not know what dangers surround him. He doesn't know how to protect himself or cope in the wilderness. Even worse, he is now injured.</p>
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Teaching Sequence

Low order literate orientation

In low order literate orientation the teacher provides an overview of the purpose of the lesson. This overview could include a brief summary of the whole story, then the segment that will be studied or read to the class that day. The purpose of the overview is to focus students on the important meaning that they need to attend to when the story is read to them.

Another focus of low order literate orientation is to make sure that all students understand that they are learning about the writing techniques the author used to construct parts of the text as well as learning to comprehend it. In the course of a study of this book, there are many possible options. All possibilities suggested here relate to the text analysis above.

With a text this long there are several approaches that could be taken to teaching students how to read and interpret the passage and how to understand the writing techniques the author has used. Use the text analysis to inform how you think about this.

One angle that suggests itself is that Brian is in a perilous situation. He has survived the crash, but has little to eat with no real means of finding food that will sustain him for long. He has rudimentary shelter with little protection from the elements or any danger. Now, in this passage his situation grows even worse.

To emphasise Brian's predicament, the author lets readers share Brian's terror by describing an incident that demonstrates his helplessness. This city boy will then appear quite doomed, which sets the scene for the rest of the book when he actually learns to cope and survive. This incident makes his achievement against the odds even more astonishing.

When introducing this passage to students point out that the author needed to make this part of the story suspenseful and seemingly hopeless for Brian. To help readers identify with Brian and his fear the author has described the scene through senses other than sight. Because Brian cannot see he has to imagine what is in the shelter with him through his sense of hearing, his sense of smell with sight only playing a small part. In fact it is what he can't see that is important.

There is repetitiveness in the text that could be the basis for discussion. For example, the author uses the conjunction 'but' consistently to change the direction the text seems to be taking, as in the initial sound being like a growl, **but** ... This is a suspense-building device.

There is also another emerging pattern that can be discussed. Brian senses something (a sound or smell) and then he reacts with an action (kicking,

throwing, skittering, touching) or with a thought or feeling or with a cry (thought, terrified, screamed).

Suspense is also built by withholding the source of the noise, the smell and the pain. It isn't until the end of the passage that readers know for sure that a porcupine was in the shelter with Brian although there are several hints along the way.

There is also some foreshadowing of future events in the passage as in the moment when Brian throws the hatchet and it makes sparks as it hits the walls of the shelter. Later Brian remembers the sparks when he eventually learns to make a fire.

The passage is quite long and teachers might cover the low order literate orientation across several days. The suggestions provided above are just that, suggestions and are certainly not all that could be discussed in using this passage to teach comprehension and writing techniques.

Read the passage to the students following low order literate orientation.

High order literate orientation

Use the text analysis as a guide to carry out the high order literate orientation through which the teacher shifts the students' focus from discussing the text in general to the actual wording of the text.

For example, in looking at the first paragraph of the text above, a teacher might explain that the author writes about the noise that first woke Brian and is a bit like a false alarm. Although it sounded like a growl in fact it wasn't and turned out to be something quite harmless. Students could then identify the words the author used to tell readers what woke Brian, where he was, what he was thinking, what he thought he heard, and how the author uses the word 'but' to reveal what really made the noise. Students could underline or highlight all the 'buts' in the passage to emphasise its use. Another focus for high order literate orientation could be the words that stage the text in time such as "At first, then and now". Without these ordering words it would be harder for readers to follow the sequence of events.

Identifying the actual wording of the text and the effect these words have on readers is important in high order literate orientation.

Transformations

With a text this length, there are several approaches teachers could take to analysing the text, and the approach will depend on each teacher's goals for the teaching sequence.

One approach could be to look at the whole text in paragraphs. Cover or remove the sections of the text highlighted in green below. Read the text without these sections and note that it makes sense, it tells what happened to Brian and readers know that Brian couldn't see.

At first he thought it was a growl. In the still darkness of the shelter in the middle of the night his eyes came open and he was awake and he thought there was a growl. But it was the wind, a medium wind in the pines had made some sound and brought him up, brought him awake. He sat up and was hit with the smell.

It terrified him. The smell was one of rot, some musty rot that made him think only of graves with cobwebs and dust and old death. His nostrils widened and he opened his eyes wider but he could see nothing. It was too dark, too hard dark with clouds covering even the small light from the stars, and he could not see. But the smell was alive, alive and full and in the shelter. He thought of the bear, thought of Bigfoot and every monster he had ever seen in every horror film he had ever watched, and his heart hammered in his throat.

Then he heard the slithering. A brushing sound, a slithering brushing sound near his feet – and he kicked out as hard as he could, kicked out and threw the hatchet at the sound, a noise coming from his throat. But the hatchet missed, sailed into the wall where it hit the rocks with a shower of sparks, and his leg was instantly torn with pain, as if a hundred needles and been driven into it. “Unnnngh!”

Now he screamed, with the pain and fear, and skittered on his backside up into the corner of the shelter, breathing through his mouth, straining to see, to hear.

The slithering sound moved again, he stopped his breath. He felt he could see a low dark form, a bulk in the darkness, a shadow that lived, but now it moved away, slithering and scraping it moved away and he saw, or thought he saw it go out of the door opening.

He lay on his side for a moment, then pulled a rasping breath in and held it, listening for the attacker to return. When it was apparent that the shadow wasn't coming back he felt the calf of his leg, where the pain was centred, and spreading to fill the whole leg.

His fingers gingerly touched a group of needles that had been driven through his trousers and into the fleshy part of his calf. They were stiff and very sharp on the ends that stuck out, and he knew then what the attacker had been. A porcupine had stumbled into his shelter and when he had kicked it the thing had slapped him with its tail of quills.

Discuss how readers cannot identify as well with Brian's experience without the expansions that tell how bad the smell was and all of Brian's thoughts and feelings. At this larger level, transformations can help students understand the importance of this information.

Using the whole passage in this way provides additional opportunities for students to read it as well.

Other transformations sessions could include analysing the paragraph that describes the smell and the information contained in it. Discussion of this paragraph would include reasons why this information was important to readers. Not every paragraph of the passage needs to be used for transformations activities. Teachers can decide on the passages that would add most value for their students.

Transformation activities could also be used to identify how the author uses sounds, smells and touch rather than just sight to build a frightening context and how including the character's thoughts and reactions enhances the suspense.

Identify the structure of each of the paragraphs and discuss how it helps readers write like Gary Paulsen by identifying the order in which he introduces information. For example:

Awareness of a sound

At first he thought
it was a growl.

Setting

In the still darkness of the shelter in the middle of the night

Character's response

his eyes came open
and he was awake
and he thought
there was a growl.

These activities provide a context for discussing not just the meaning of the words but why they are used as well as for a deeper discussion about the author's writing technique.

Deal with other sentences in the paragraph and the other paragraphs in a similar manner basing the segmenting of the text on the text analysis and your writing goals.

Spelling

Base the words you choose for spelling on the year level of the students and on the type of spelling knowledge appropriate for this level. The National Curriculum document for spelling provides information about the spelling knowledge for different year levels. For example, Year 7,

Understand how to use spelling rules and word origins, for example Greek and Latin roots, base words, suffixes, prefixes, spelling patterns and generalisations to learn new words and how to spell them (ACELA1539)

An example of a word with a Latin root that would aid comprehension is 'porcupine'. Its origin is from the Latin *porcus* = pig + *spina* = thorn.

This passage also contains many words ending with –ed, e.g. terrified, widened, opened, stopped, lived and moved. Find the base word and discuss how to add –ed to words when writing in the past tense; e.g. terrify has the y replaced with i before adding ed. Widen and open simply have –ed added. Stop has the p doubled. Lived and moved that end in –e simply have a d added. Discuss why this is so and generalise to other words that can be written in the past tense.

Similarly, discuss the words ending with –ing and how this suffix is added to base words.

Note that these are examples and not all that could be discussed about spelling and decoding in this passage. Choose words that relate to or add understanding about previous words you may have studied with the class.

Writing

It is not necessary to use the whole study text as the focus of a writing workshop or to stick to the exact structure identified in the text. A more generalised structure could be used to teach students how to use different senses and how to include a character's thoughts, feelings and reactions to build suspense in writing.

For example:

Awareness of a sound

Setting

Character's response

Then perhaps

Awareness of an odour

Character's thoughts

Description of odour

Character's reaction

Several shorter writing workshops of this type could be more productive than trying to force a longer writing workshop into the structure used by the author.

Examples of settings for workshops could be camping in the bush in a tent when a character was woken by a noise outside the tent. What did it sound like and smell like? Preparation for this workshop would include thinking of the source of the sound and smell first so that appropriate descriptions of it.

Another setting could be a student's bedroom at home. The student was woken by an unusual noise or odour.

These writing workshops would be followed by students attempting a longer piece of writing as free composition in which they introduce different senses to make the writing suspenseful.